

Lenin Is Alive and Well and

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AMID the feast of information and candor set forth by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, it is worth pointing out that the spectral figure of agitprop — the weary old Bolshevik specialist in manipulating information — still holds a high place at the table of glasnost. In the war of nerves between the Kremlin and the breakaway republic of Lithuania, Soviet Government dominance of most information channels has been on display with a pervasiveness that Lenin first dreamed of.

However robust the seeming press outspokenness on most questions of history and contemporary life, the Kremlin still commands the opinion-making machinery on issues it regards as too important for free debate — especially issues that touch its sense of national security, delicate points of foreign policy, and ethnic strains.

"People always have been and they always will be stupid victims of deceit and self-deception in politics," Lenin said in a prescription for managing information. In the matter of Lithuania, the Gorbachev Government's in-



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Armored vehicles parked at a Soviet Army base in Vilnius, Lithuania, last week.

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dulgence of its information monopoly, while allowing warmer smiles on the anchor people of the evening news, has been a show in itself, a golden oldies of agitprop as the state's side of things is told again and again.

Lithuanian voices have been hard to hear in all the increased coverage as Mr. Gorbachev has his nightly say on Vremya, the national TV news, through Kremlin directives read out with the gravity of orthodox truth. The background of the crisis — Lithuania's forced annexation in 1940, Mr. Gorbachev's executive quandary as the other republics watch — is nowhere in sight, even as the modern citizen becomes used to more open debate. Instead, Tass, the main press agency, focuses on the Association of Soviet Prosecutors, collectively warning that Lithuanian law is not being enforced. Newspaper and broadcast editors focus on suggestions that violent resistance may be in the works by Lithuanians, who have remained pacific in two years of separatist demands.

An extra TV program on the problem was scheduled for the nation, but it turned out to be devoted to a large, colorful crowd of counter-Lithuanian protesters in Vilnius complaining that the republic's majority is abusive. Most of the demonstrators were Russian immigrants.

The rattling of the airwaves, reinforced by a theatrical use of troop movements in Vilnius itself, seemed designed to demoralize the Lithuanians into retreat. By the end of last week, Lithuanians could not exclude that the Soviet public was also being braced for a use of force, despite Kremlin vows that nothing of the kind was planned.

In each day's rough-and-tumble of reality, of democratization slowly trying to take hold in an often baffled nation, the notion that pluralism deserves a guaranteed place in state-controlled forums has not yet surfaced with any force. There are occasional late-night talk shows where selected dissidents appear, but their views can seem merely an outrageous form of entertainment outside the news formats. When Mr. Gorbachev's appointment to a stronger presidency was debated recently, the emerging opposition did not get anything close to a fair share of speaking time on TV news.

Mr. Gorbachev, the progenitor of glasnost and democratization, on occasion has even needled the opposition in the parliament to go back to their private caucus if they want a fuller hearing of their views. Clearly the nation has a long way to go before reaching the richly diverse public forum that some insurgents dream about.